

PIECES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM SITE VISITS FOR THE WV PRE-K

MARCH 12, 2004

Over the past several months, beginning in November 2003 and ending in February 2004, members of the PIECES Technical Assistance Team for the WV Pre-k Program, have conducted site visits in the following counties: Nicholas, Taylor, Monongalia, Braxton, Cabell, Roane, and Webster. PIECES Technical Assistance members participating in this process were Dr. Cathy Jones and Karen Duckworth, West Virginia Department of Education; Melanie Clark, West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resources; and Margie Hale, West Virginia PIECES Advisory Council.

The intent of these site visits was to gather informational data, from a sampling of counties statewide, to determine how various counties were establishing collaborative pre-k classrooms as required by West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525. The Technical Assistance Team had county collaborative classes complete the Classroom Profile Document, which is part of the County Plan Document for the SY 2004-05. The specific objective to be accomplished by the visit was to determine whether the county observed could be named as a potential “model” for collaborative classrooms throughout the state. These counties could then serve as a resource for counties to determine which type of collaborative classroom would best address their needs.

The site visits proved to be quite beneficial from a variety of perspectives. Although classroom observations were focused on partnership and contractual arrangements, team members observed evidence of quality pre-k education as defined in West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525 in the majority of classes visited. The children were secure and happy, actively engaged, and experiencing developmentally appropriate educational activities in a classroom of highly dedicated early childhood professionals. In addition, in most counties visited, movement toward fully inclusive pre-k classrooms was noted. Curriculum most often used was either High Scope or Creative Curriculum, although not all classroom teachers have actually received formal training in either. It appeared to team members that the counties most “on-track” with developmentally appropriate activities were those that had previously been affiliated with EDUCARE and/or were participating with HEAD START partners.

Examples of quality WV Pre-k classrooms included classes with the following:

1. Well-defined learning centers.
2. Room arrangement conducive to children’s active learning.
3. Strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy throughout the classroom.
4. Child-produced artwork displayed throughout the classroom.
5. Emphasis on emergent writing skills and writing around the room.
6. Good organization and content of a variety of classroom materials and displays.
7. Evidence of the presence and use of technology throughout the classroom (to include audiotape recorders, computers, cameras, etc.)

8. Numerous opportunities for child choice and initiative.
9. Positive classroom management strategies.
10. Quality interactions between teachers and all students.
11. Strong presence of oral language facilitation.
12. Evidence of ongoing integration of curriculum and activities.

In contrast, team members noted in several classrooms visited there were obvious displays of disregard for West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525. Areas where this appeared and where it impacted quality and delivery of instruction were as follows:

1. Use of worksheets on a regular basis.
2. Long periods of sitting to include inappropriate use of direct instruction versus a more developmentally appropriate approach to child-centered instruction.
3. Lack of well-defined learning centers.
4. Little or no evidence of age-appropriate art and/or music activities.
5. Little or no evidence of program components designed to support literacy, early numeracy, and language activities.
6. Practices not appropriate for ages/stages of a child's developmental level.

In conclusion, the team identified overall issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure quality universally throughout WV Pre-k classrooms, both within and outside of the public education realm, include these major areas:

1. Professional Staff Development and Training
 - a. Use of specific curriculum in order to meet appropriate learning goals and objectives.
 - b. Use of developmentally appropriate techniques.
 - c. Incorporation of the Early Learning Standards Framework.
2. Continued public education and awareness, to include parental involvement, in the area of developmentally appropriate early childhood education.
3. Policy and procedure designed to allow for the assurance of consistent implementation of West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525 across all partnerships in a fair and equitable manner. This could include using established evaluation tools such as the ECERS-R and the ELLCO.